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ABSTRACT

This document presents findings from interviews conducted to obtain information on changes that have occurred in state Special Education Advisory Panels (SEAPs) since the passage of the 1997 amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The interviews investigated general organizational changes, SEAP involvement in the State Improvement Grant (SIG) process, and SEAP involvement in the Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process. Information was obtained through a telephone interview process involving SEAPs in Connecticut, Idaho, Maryland, Massachusetts, Montana, Nebraska, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. Interviewees reported minimal changes to SEAP size and more noticeable changes in membership composition following the 1997 amendments to IDEA. Changes in composition were commonly reported to be the result of the "special rule of majority," which states that a majority must be individuals with disabilities or parents of children with disabilities. SEAP roles and responsibilities were overwhelmingly perceived to have increased. The SIG and Continuous Improvement Monitoring Processes were seen to have contributed significantly to the expanded involvement of SEAPs in state activities. Interviewees expressed the belief that SEAP members have become empowered as never before to raise and address issues of major concern to individuals with disabilities. The interview protocol is included in the report. (CR)

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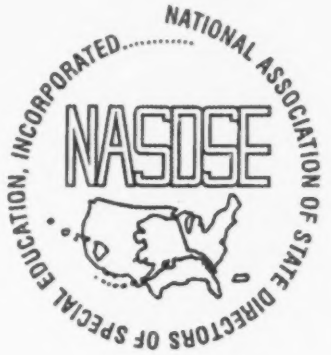
State Special Education Advisory Panels: Changes Since the Passage of the 1997 Amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

by

Diane L. Miller, Ed. D.



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State Special Education Advisory Panels: Changes Since the Passage of the 1997 Amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

Executive Summary

This document presents findings from interviews conducted to obtain information on changes that have occurred in state Special Education Advisory Panels (SEAPs) since the passage of the 1997 amendments to Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This work was part of a Cooperative Agreement with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and Project FORUM at the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE). Three focus areas were established for the inquiry: 1) general organizational changes related to the roles and responsibilities of the SEAP; 2) SEAP involvement in the State Improvement Grant (SIG) process; and 3) SEAP involvement in the Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process.

Interviewees reported minimal changes to SEAP size and more noticeable changes in membership composition following the 1997 amendments to IDEA. Size variation was not attributed to changes in the federal guidelines; however, changes in composition were commonly reported to be the result of the "special rule of majority." This rule states that a majority of panel members must be individuals with disabilities or parents of children with disabilities.

SEAP roles and responsibilities were overwhelmingly perceived to have increased. For some panels, the changes have been realized in the increased breadth of new topics now being brought to the table. The SIG and Continuous Improvement Monitoring Processes were seen to have contributed significantly to the expanded involvement of SEAPs in state activities. Interviewees expressed the belief that SEAP members have become empowered as never before to raise and address issues of major concern to individuals with disabilities. They reported an increased sense of duty and responsibility.

SEAP involvement in the SIG process was described as significant, and all interviewees expect that the SEAP will continue to receive updates as the grant activities are implemented. Discussion about OSEP's Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process elicited highly positive responses, and the SEAP's role in this process was perceived to be valued. Additionally, the majority of interviewees expressed the view that the new monitoring process is very "friendly" and showed promise of improved educational results for individuals with disabilities.

Interviewees expressed a desire for increased training opportunities that would develop strong organizational leadership skills and facilitate collaboration among SEAPs in other states. The development of leadership skills to work with the diverse SEAP membership and the delicate balance of responsibility versus individual agendas was recognized as important.

Few challenges were reported, but the most frequent was that of meeting the requirements of the "special rule of majority." Tied to this issue is the concern about maintaining adequate membership attendance at meetings and overcoming geographic barriers to attendance. States continue to provide many supports to encourage attendance.

State Special Education Advisory Panels: Changes Since the Passage of the 1997 Amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

Introduction

Overview

In the Fall of 2000, a study was initiated by Project FORUM at the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) to examine the roles and functions of state Special Education Advisory Panels (SEAPs) and to report changes that have occurred since the passage of the 1997 amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This study was part of Project FORUM's work on its Cooperative Agreement with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

The purpose of the study is summarized as follows:

1. To gain information regarding changes that occurred in the membership composition, organizational policies and procedures, and responsibilities of the SEAPs since passage of the 1997 amendments to IDEA;
2. To obtain information regarding involvement of the SEAPs in the State Improvement Grant (SIG) process; and
3. To obtain information related to involvement of the SEAPs in OSEP's Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process.

The opinions in this document are not intended to reflect the opinions of all SEAPs. Rather, the document seeks to provide information representing a cross section of views and perspectives from SEAPs in states that have received a SIG and are currently involved in the OSEP Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process.

Method

Information for this document was obtained through a telephone interview process involving individuals directly associated with the SEAPs in eight states: Connecticut, Idaho, Maryland, Massachusetts, Montana, Nebraska, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. Each of the participating states has a SIG and is currently involved in one of the stages of OSEP's Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process cycle. The states are geographically disbursed throughout various regions of the country, including highly populated and less populated states.

State directors of special education in the selected states were asked to provide names of interviewees that fall into three categories associated with the operation of the SEAP. The three categories included staff member from the State Education Agency (SEA), person in a leadership role on the SEAP prior to the 1997 amendments, and person in a leadership role on the SEAP following the 1997 amendments. A request was made that the SEA representative be either the state director or staff member directly responsible to the SEAP, and that the two SEAP

representatives be the current and past SEAP chairs. The interviews took place during August and September 2000. A copy of the interview protocol may be found in Appendix A.

Additional background and anecdotal information included in this document has been obtained from SEAP members who attended OSEP Leadership Conferences and two previous studies related to SEAPs.

Organization of Document

The first section of this document provides background on IDEA and SEAPs. The second section provides a comparison of the changes in the 1997 amendments that have directly impacted the SEAPs. In the third section, the three areas of inquiry addressed during the interview process are discussed and a summary of information obtained from the participating interviewees is outlined. The document concludes with a brief section on direction for future study.

Background of IDEA and Special Education Advisory Panels Prior to 1997

Over the past 25 years, citizens of the United States have witnessed changes of monumental proportion in the field of special education. Today, the IDEA is recognized for its profound influence on special education service delivery. State Departments of Education have incorporated the use of committees and advisory panels for many years. Their noticeable existence and impact have varied, similar to structural elements in any organization. These committees have served to guide changes in services to children since 1975, when the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142) was passed.

State Special Education Advisory Panels (SEAPs)[1] have been a part of the state organizational structure for years. Prior to the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA, it was not uncommon to see SEAPs primarily comprised of educators and other professionals in the field. While these individuals play a critical role in the education of children with disabilities, the lesser involvement of parents and individuals with disabilities on the SEAPs was recognized as a missing link necessary for providing a comprehensive perspective on special education services in the states.

In general, the function of the SEAP is to advise the SEA of unmet needs within the state related to the education of children with disabilities. The state panel provides advice in the following areas: developing evaluations, reporting data to the Secretary, and developing corrective action plans to address findings identified in federal monitoring reports under Part B of the Act. Additionally, the SEAP is to advise the SEA in developing and implementing policies related to the coordination of services for children with disabilities. The SEAP also comments publicly on

[1] The term "State Advisory Panel" is used in the IDEA; however, a variety of terms are used around the country (e.g., special education advisory panel, special education advisory council). "Special Education Advisory Panel" (SEAP) is used in this document to distinguish this panel from others not focused on special education issues.

any rules or regulations proposed by the state regarding the education of children with disabilities. (See page 5 for federal regulations on functions of the panel.)

In March of 1996, a study was conducted to examine SEAP composition, panel agendas and goals, and members' satisfaction and perceptions of their panel's effectiveness (Belcher, Cole, & Fletcher, 1997). The study provided a snapshot of SEAPs prior to the reauthorization of IDEA. The target population for the survey research was the SEAPs in the 50 states and in the District of Columbia. The results of the study indicated that SEAP size ranged from 7 to 50 members, with a mean of 20. The typical panel consisted of one individual with disabilities, four family members of individuals with disabilities, three teachers of individuals with disabilities, four state and local education officials, three administrators of programs for individuals with disabilities, and five other members. The typical panel member was reported to be white, female, 46 years of age, residing in an urban setting, working in the field of education, and holding a master's degree. Belcher et al. (1997) found that if the panel is perceived as fulfilling the legal and legislative mandates, then the panel will be perceived as effective.

Changes to IDEA in 1997 Impacting Special Education Advisory Panels

The 1997 amendments to IDEA require a SEAP composition that looks quite different from that reported as "typical" in the 1996 study described above. In addition, although the SEAP has consistently served in an advisory capacity to the state, the 1997 reauthorization created a renewed focus on the role of the SEAP. Through changes in the required panel membership, the amendments emphasized the SEAP's potential for an increased role in the education of individuals with disabilities. Changes in the structure and composition of the SEAP reflect attempts to focus on the importance of involving parents and individuals with disabilities. A restructuring of the panel's composition and renewed emphasis on its advisory role serves to assure that the child remains the primary focus of state activities.

In a February 1998 memorandum sent to Chief State School Officers, Thomas Hehir, then Director of OSEP, outlined "Procedures for States to Follow" in order to receive a grant award under Part B of the IDEA for federal fiscal year 1998. Included in the memorandum was a summary of the relevant changes in Part B of the IDEA, as set forth in the 1997 IDEA amendments, for the 1998-99 school year. Those sections of the memorandum, later issued as final regulations, are as follows:

> *This section* [20 U.S.C. §1412(a)(21)] *retains the requirements in the original version of the law regarding the establishment of a State advisory panel, with the following changes:*
>
> *(1) A requirement is added that the advisory panel must include representatives of private schools and public charter schools, and representatives from the State juvenile and adult corrections agencies;*
>
> *(2) A requirement is added that a majority of the members of the panel must be individuals with disabilities or parents of children with disabilities;*

(3) The section retains the requirement that the advisory panel must comment publicly on any rules or regulations proposed by the State regarding the education of children with disabilities, but does not retain the requirement in prior law that the advisory panel must comment publicly on the procedures for distribution of funds under Part B;

(4) A requirement is added that the advisory panel must advise the SEA in developing corrective action plans to address findings in Federal Part B monitoring reports; and

(5) A requirement is added that the advisory panel must advise the SEA in developing and implementing policies relating to the coordination of services for children with disabilities.

The side-by-side chart on the following pages compares the old federal regulations governing SEAPs prior to the 1997 amendments to IDEA and the new regulations issued March 12, 1999.

Federal Regulations Prior to the 1997 Amendments to the IDEA	Federal Regulations Issued March 12, 1999
[CITE: 34CFR300.147] TITLE 34--EDUCATION CHAPTER III--OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION PART 300--ASSISTANCE TO STATES FOR THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES--Table of Contents Subpart B--State Plans and Local Educational Agency Applications Sec. 300.147 State advisory panel. Each State plan must provide that the requirements of Secs. 300.650-300.653 are met. (Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1413(a)(12))	[CITE: 34CFR300.150] TITLE 34—EDUCATION CHAPTER III--OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION PART 300--ASSISTANCE TO STATES FOR THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES--Table of Contents Subpart B—State and Local Eligibility Sec. 300.150 State advisory panel. The State must have on file with the Secretary information to demonstrate that the State has established and maintains an advisory panel for the purpose of providing policy guidance with respect to special education and related services for children with disabilities in the State in accordance with the requirements of Secs. 300.650-300.653. (Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(21)(A))
Subpart F--State Administration Sec. 300.650 Establishment. (a) Each State shall establish, in accordance with the provisions of Secs. 300.650-300.653, a State advisory panel on the education of children with disabilities. (b) The advisory panel must be appointed by the Governor or any other official authorized under State law to make those appointments. (c) If a State has an existing advisory panel that can perform the functions in Sec. 300.652, the State may modify the existing panel so that it fulfills all of the requirements of Secs. 300.650-300.653, instead of establishing a new advisory panel. (Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1413(a)(12))	Subpart F--State Administration Sec. 300.650 Establishment of advisory panels. Retained with no change. (Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(21)(A))

Federal Regulations Prior to the 1997 Amendments to the IDEA	Federal Regulations Issued March 12, 1999
Sec. 300.651 Membership. (a) The membership of the State advisory panel must be composed of persons involved in or concerned with the education of children with disabilities. The membership must include at least one person representative of each of the following groups-- (1) Individuals with disabilities; (2) Teachers of children with disabilities; (3) Parents of children with disabilities; (4) State and local educational officials; and (5) Special education program administrators. (b) The State may expand the advisory panel to include additional persons in the groups listed in paragraph (a) of this section and representatives of other groups not listed. (Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1413(a)(12)) Note: The membership of the State advisory panel, as listed in paragraphs (a)(1)-(5) of this section, is required in section 613(a)(12) of the Act. As indicated in paragraph (b) of this section, the composition of the panel and the number of members may be expanded at the discretion of the State. In adding to the membership, consideration could be given to having-- (1) An appropriate balance between professional groups and consumers (i.e., parents, advocates, and individuals with disabilities); (2) Broad representation within the consumer-advocate groups, to ensure that the interests and points of view of various parents, advocates and individuals with disabilities are appropriately represented; (3) Broad representation within professional groups (e.g., regular education personnel: special educators, including teachers, teacher trainers, and administrators, who can properly represent various dimensions in the education of children with disabilities; and appropriate related services personnel); and (4) Representatives from other State advisory panels (such as vocational education). If a State elects to maintain a small advisory panel (e.g., 10-15 members), the panel itself could take steps to ensure that it (1) consults with and receives inputs from various consumer and special interest professional groups, and (2) establishes Committees for particular short-term purposes composed of representatives from those input groups.	Sec. 300.651 Membership. (a) General. The membership of the State advisory panel must consist of members appointed by the Governor, or any other official authorized under State law to make these appointments, that is representative of the State population and that is composed of individuals involved in, or concerned with the education of children with disabilities, including-- (1) Parents of children with disabilities; (2) Individuals with disabilities; (3) Teachers; (4) Representatives of institutions of higher education that prepare special education and related services personnel; (5) State and local education officials; (6) Administrators of programs for children with disabilities; (7) Representatives of other State agencies involved in the financing or delivery of related services to children with disabilities; (8) Representatives of private schools and public charter schools; (9) At least one representative of a vocational, community, or business organization concerned with the provision of transition services to children with disabilities; and (10) Representatives from the State juvenile and adult corrections agencies. (b) Special rule. A majority of the members of the panel must be individuals with disabilities or parents of children with disabilities. (Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(21)(B) and (C))

Federal Regulations Prior to the 1997 Amendments to the IDEA	Federal Regulations Issued March 12, 1999
Sec. 300.652 Advisory panel functions. The State advisory panel shall-- (a) Advise the SEA of unmet needs within the State in the education of children with disabilities; (b) Comment publicly on the State plan and rules or regulations proposed for issuance by the State regarding the education of children with disabilities and the procedures for distribution of funds under this part; and (c) Assist the State in developing and reporting such information and evaluations as may assist the Secretary in the performance of his responsibilities under section 618 of the Act. (Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1413(a)(12))	Sec. 300.652 Advisory panel functions. (a) General. The State advisory panel shall-- (1) Advise the SEA of unmet needs within the State in the education of children with disabilities; (2) Comment publicly on any rules or regulations proposed by the State regarding the education of children with disabilities; (3) Advise the SEA in developing evaluations and reporting on data to the Secretary under section 618 of the Act; (4) Advise the SEA in developing corrective action plans to address findings identified in Federal monitoring reports under Part B of the Act; and (5) Advise the SEA in developing and implementing policies relating to the coordination of services for children with disabilities. (b) Advising on eligible students with disabilities in adult prisons. The advisory panel also shall advise on the education of eligible students with disabilities who have been convicted as adults and incarcerated in adult prisons, even if, consistent with Sec. 300.600(d), a State assigns general supervision responsibility for those students to a public agency other than a SEA. (Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(21)(D))
Sec. 300.653 Advisory panel procedures. (a) The advisory panel shall meet as often as necessary to conduct its business. (b) By July 1 of each year, the advisory panel shall submit an annual report of panel activities and suggestions to the SEA. This report must be made available to the public in a manner consistent with other public reporting requirements of this part. (c) Official minutes must be kept on all panel meetings and shall be made available to the public on request. (d) All advisory panel meetings and agenda items must be publicly announced prior to the meeting, and meetings must be open to the public.	Sec. 300.653 Advisory panel procedures. (a) The advisory panel shall meet as often as necessary to conduct its business. (b) By July 1 of each year, the advisory panel shall submit an annual report of panel activities and suggestions to the SEA. This report must be made available to the public in a manner consistent with other public reporting requirements of Part B of the Act. (c) Official minutes must be kept on all panel meetings and must be made available to the public on request. (d) All advisory panel meetings and agenda items must be announced enough in advance of the meeting to afford interested parties a reasonable opportunity to attend. Meetings must be open to the public.

Federal Regulations Prior to the 1997 Amendments to the IDEA	Federal Regulations Issued March 12, 1999
(e) Interpreters and other necessary services must be provided at panel meetings for panel members or participants. The State may pay for these services from funds under Sec. 300.620. (f) The advisory panel shall serve without compensation but the State must reimburse the panel for reasonable and necessary expenses for attending meetings and performing duties. The State may use funds under Sec. 300.620 for this purpose. (Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1413(a)(12)) (Approved by the Office of Management and Budget under control number 1820-0030) [57 FR 44798, Sept. 29, 1992, as amended at 58 FR 13528, Mar. 11, 1993]	(e) Interpreters and other necessary services must be provided at panel meetings for panel members or participants. The State may pay for these services from funds under Sec. 300.620. (f) The advisory panel shall serve without compensation but the State must reimburse the panel for reasonable and necessary expenses for attending meetings and performing duties. The State may use funds under Sec. 300.620 for this purpose. (Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(21))

In 1998, the Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center (MPRRC) conducted a study for the purpose of assisting states in their efforts to comply with the new SEAP guidelines (Miller & Copenhaver, 1998). The result of the study was the development of a three-part resource document that included existing "best practices" as identified by SEAPs and sample documents to assist states in developing their SEAP organization. States were eager to share information and support one another as they worked to remodel the existing organization. At the time of this study, it was not uncommon to have state representatives report that their SEAP met once or twice a year to "receive" reports from the SEA and provide minimal feedback.

Since the 1998 MPRRC study, informal conversations with state representatives have indicated a change in SEAP roles. Panel members reportedly have greater involvement with state initiatives and are more likely to view themselves as "valued participants" in their states' special education program. The study described in this document was designed, in part, to explore these perceived changes.

Project FORUM Interview Results

The following three sections discuss interviewee responses to questions asked during the Project FORUM interview process. The three sections focus on the following areas: 1) changes that have occurred in the membership composition, roles, and responsibilities of SEAPs since the 1997 amendments to IDEA; 2) the involvement of SEAPs in the SIG process; and 3) the involvement of SEAPs in the OSEP Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process. Each section provides an overview of information received from participants and concludes with a summary list of key points.

SEAP Membership Composition, Roles and Responsibilities

All state representatives involved in this study perceive that the changes in Part B of the IDEA, as set forth in the IDEA amendments of 1997 and implementing regulations, impacted their SEAPs to varying degrees. The primary "change factor" in the view of all interviewees is the "special rule of majority." This rule requires that at least 51 percent of the members serving on the SEAP must be individuals with disabilities or parents of children with disabilities.

Size of SEAP

While one might anticipate that panel size would be a constant among SEAPs due to the membership representation outlined in the law, this did not prove to be the case. Prior to and following the 1997 amendments, SEAP size and constituencies represented on the SEAPs varied. For example, Ohio and Maryland interviewees reported that the size of their SEAPs is determined by federal guidelines. However, the Connecticut state statute requires additional members beyond what is required to meet federal requirements--four appointed members of the General Assembly, one appointed by the majority leader of the House of Representatives, one appointed by the minority leader of House of Representatives, one appointed by the president pro tempore of the Senate and one appointed by the minority leader of the Senate.

Panel size ranges from approximately 15 in Montana to approximately 39 in Ohio. Even within states, interviewees did not always report the same membership size. This appeared to be the result of fluctuating numbers due to irregular attendance patterns and vacancies. In all cases, the interviewees reported that efforts were made to maintain required membership on their panels. However, these efforts were not always successful due to individual attendance patterns and the time necessary for processing membership appointments.

The majority of interviewees reported minimal changes in SEAP size following the 1997 amendments and in states where changes occurred, they were not attributed to these amendments. In Connecticut, interviewees reported that changes in size were related to the changes in their own state statute. In Ohio, interviewees attributed a slight increase in membership size to restructuring of the panel's composition. Nebraska reported that prior to the 1997 amendments, state guidelines specified that there be equal representation of parents and service providers on the SEAP. As a result, only one additional member was necessary to satisfy the "special rule of majority."

Pennsylvania and Idaho reported that new people were added to satisfy requirements in the 1997 amendments. In Pennsylvania, this resulted in a slight increase in panel size -- from 30 to 31, whereas in Idaho, there was actually a slight decrease. This decrease occurred as a result of allowing members to represent more than one required category. For example, an individual who filled the role of "state education official" might also satisfy the role of "individual with a disability." Reasons given for this practice include the desire to maintain a manageable panel size, actively involve members in duties, and increase the likelihood of obtaining a quorum. In contrast, Ohio maintains a larger panel because members are appointed to represent only one constituency. An interviewee stated that this decision was based on a concern that it might be

difficult for an individual to adequately represent the views of more that one constituency, and parents requested that they not be required to represent two categories.

Composition of SEAP

All interviewees indicated that SEAP composition changed as a result of adding members to satisfy the "special rule of majority." The impact of this rule ranged from a reported one-member adjustment in Nebraska to a larger adjustment in Ohio where the SEAP prior to the 1997 amendments had a majority representation of regional superintendents and did not reflect the diverse representation that now exists.

Most interviewees indicated that prior to the 1997 amendments there was a desire to have a greater representation of parents and individuals with disabilities on the SEAP. However, since reauthorization, states have increased efforts to maintain majority representation of parents and individuals with disabilities and ensure their participation at meetings. Interviewees reported that it was not difficult to find parents willing to serve on the panel. The challenge for states is to ensure regular attendance from members who are parents and individuals with disabilities. States continue to provide childcare, transportation, and other assistance to facilitate attendance; however, efforts are not always successful.

Beyond the involvement of parents and individuals with disabilities, efforts to ensure representation from traditionally underrepresented groups and improve diversity on SEAPs are present in all states that participated in the Project FORUM interviews. In all cases, states seek to adhere to the categories of representation specified in the 1997 amendments to IDEA.

Roles and Responsibilities

The majority of interviewees reported that SEAP roles and responsibilities have changed since the 1997 amendments to IDEA, and that panel members have become more involved in state activities. A few interviewees described the role of the SEAP prior to the 1997 amendments as that of "receiver of information" and described the current role of the SEAP as one of "active participant" and "valued advisor" in state activities. Even in states where historically the SEAP had an active role, there is an increased perception of "valued partnership." The interviewees reported that there are efforts to change past perceptions and promote involvement, with the goal of improving results for students. Interviewees also noted that there are increased numbers of panel members on state committees, and more opportunities for citizens to share information with the SEAP members. Two initiatives have had the greatest influence on SEAP involvement in state committees and activities — the SIGs and the Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process.

A number of interviewees attributed the increased involvement of SEAPs to persons in leadership roles. Although the role of leadership was not addressed specifically, interviewees in seven of the eight participating states directly attributed improvements to leaders in the following positions: commissioner of education, special education director, and/or SEAP chair. Some of the individual interviewee comments regarding the role of leadership are paraphrased below:

- Involvement of the SEAP has changed, but not because of IDEA. Leadership changed, and the leadership included the SEAP.

- The person in the SEAP leadership position is key to the SEAP's success.

- SEAP involvement has changed because there has been stronger leadership within the panel and state education agency.

- In recent years, the chairs have developed an organizational format that is more functional and individual panel members take leadership roles for committee functions around public policies and training issues.

- The SEAP has a close relationship with the SEA, working hand in hand. There has been greater involvement due to strong support from the state director.

- Changes in leadership and support from a new state commissioner of education increased SEAP involvement and the importance of the SEAP within the state.

- The commissioner of education (from one state) made it quite clear that the SEAP is the only advisory group that the state board would be taking advice from in regard to special education issues.

In-Service Training

Formal in-service training opportunities for SEAP members differed among the participating states. The majority of interviewees reported in-service in the form of an orientation or planning meeting for panel members at the beginning of the year. All states reported that their SEAP had been represented at OSEP's Leadership Conference in Washington, DC. An interviewee from Maryland reported that their SEAP was given the opportunity to participate in the state conference for local directors of special education. An interviewee from Massachusetts referred to an opportunity where all advisory panel members were brought together for a presentation by the state board of education. Interviewees from Pennsylvania, Maryland and Ohio referred to opportunities for training during their regularly scheduled meetings. A couple of interviewees stated that interested SEAP members may attend in-service opportunities for special educators.

In general, interviewees voiced confidence that they were receiving information necessary to perform their duties. There was, however, a strong desire expressed regarding the need for more in-service related to the organizational roles and responsibilities of the SEAP. Additionally, there was high interest in opportunities that would allow panel members to share information and ideas with members of SEAPs from other states. Individuals who had the opportunity to attend OSEP's Leadership Conference Pre-Session for SEAPs expressed a desire to have additional meetings with similar formats. There was interest in training for SEAP members at both the regional and national levels.

Summary

- The size of SEAPs has changed only slightly since the 1997 amendments to IDEA, and interviewees did not attribute changes in size to changes in the law. The two minor influences on size are (1) additions to the panel to meet the required representation as specified in the "special rule of majority," and (2) a state's decision to allow an individual to represent one or more constituency on the panel.

- The composition of SEAP membership was reported to have changed as a result of the "special rule of majority." Interviewees reported that maintaining the desired representation and active participation from members is a challenge.

- Diversity and increased representation of traditionally underrepresented groups continues to be a goal of all states and challenges exist in some parts of the country.

- General involvement of the SEAP in SEA activities has increased significantly (e.g., committees, stakeholder groups, and task forces). Two key initiatives that have increased SEAP involvement are the SIG and Continuous Improvement Monitoring Processes.

- Individuals with disabilities and interested groups (e.g., disability organizations and parent groups) have had an increased presence and platform for expressing views to the state through input given to SEAPs.

- The advisory role of the SEAP has increased in value, and interviewees perceive that the work of SEAP members has had a positive impact on outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

- Leadership was reported to impact the valued involvement of the SEAP, and there was recognition of the efforts of strong leadership on three levels: commissioner of education, special education director, and SEAP chair.

- The commitment of individuals serving on the panel and working at the SEA level has brought forth an expressed desire for professional development to enable each to perform their role and responsibilities with a greater level of success.

SEAP Involvement in the State Improvement Grant Process

The 1997 amendments to the IDEA include the provision for state agencies to apply for funding targeted to assist the SEAs and their partners "...in reforming and improving their systems for providing education, early intervention, and transition services, including their systems for professional development, technical assistance, and dissemination of knowledge about best

practices to improve results for children with disabilities." [20 U.S.C. §1451(b)] SIGs have been awarded to 27 states, [2] and the eight states that participated in this study all received a SIG.

The SIG monies are discretionary grants, and states have the option of competing for these awards. SIGs are an opportunity for all constituencies/stakeholders to construct and share the same "Big Picture" of the current status of the state's systemic education reform and address what needs to be done to improve the system for children and youth with disabilities (Federal Resource Center, 1997).

To be considered for a grant, states must include the following "partners" as specified by law: the governor; parents of children with disabilities; parents of nondisabled children; individuals with disabilities; organizations representing individuals with disabilities and their parents, such as parent training and information centers; community-based and other nonprofit organizations involved in the education and employment of individuals with disabilities; the lead state agency for Part C; general and special education teachers, and early intervention personnel; the state advisory panel established under Part C; the state interagency coordinating council established under Part C; and institutions of higher education within the state. [20 U.S.C. §1452(b)(1)(B)]

As part of the SIG process, states must gather data from multiple sources and include an analysis of student data to determine the needs of all children and youth with disabilities. All constituencies/stakeholders assist in constructing a plan that will address these needs and improve services. OSEP views the SIGs as a vital tool for implementing IDEA. SIGs provide an opportunity for states to develop "big picture" thinking and planning to impact systems change.

OSEP's Memorandum 99-14 explains how the State Improvement Plan, Corrective Action Plan, and SIG have complementary relationships. The memo also describes how the SIG is aligned with federal compliance reviews that focus on results for students.

> *There are three areas in which the State Improvement Grant aligns with Federal compliance reviews. First, the State Improvement Plan must include an analysis of the major findings of the Secretary's most recent reviews of the State compliance, as they relate to improving results for children with disabilities [Section 653(b)(2)(C)]. The second is that the State Improvement Plan must include a description of strategies that will address systemic problems identified in Federal compliance reviews, including shortages of qualified personnel [Section 653(c)(3)(E)]. The third area of alignment with monitoring is that in determining competitive awards the Secretary may give priority to applications on the basis of need, as indicated by such information as the findings of Federal compliance reviews [Section 653(d)(2)].*

A comparison of constituencies represented on the SEAP is very similar to the list of individuals required to be included as partners in the SIG process. Interviewees for this study all reported that their SEAPs were involved in the SIG process.

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[2] Eighteen states (AL, CA, GA, HI, ID, IA, KS, KY, MD, MA, MI, MO, NH, OH, PA, UT, VT, and VA) received SIG awards in the 1998-1999 competition and nine states (AK, CT, IL, MN, MT, NE, NC, ND, and OK) received awards in the 1999-2000 competition.

Prior to the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA and the SIG program, SEAP involvement in various types of grant applications made by the SEA was minimal and most commonly described by interviewees as the "reception of information regarding the status of an application." Several interviewees indicated that they had served on panels for other grant applications in the past because of their area of expertise or involvement with other committees; however, this was not associated with their membership on the SEAP. Recent involvement of the SEAP members in the SIG process was seen as connected to both their role on the panel and their area of expertise.

Connecticut and Nebraska interviewees reported that SEAP members participated in SIG stakeholder groups and regular reports were provided to SEAP members. In Idaho and Maryland, the SEAP was involved from the beginning of the SIG process, with some individual members involved to a more significant degree than others. A Maryland interviewee described SEAP involvement as that of identifying key outcomes and areas of improvement, gathering data, reviewing data, and receiving updates. Similarly, members from the Montana and Pennsylvania SEAPs reported being part of stakeholder groups that developed the basic foundation for the SIG, including the goals and indicators. Information was then shared with the full SEAP membership. The Ohio SEAP served as the official advisory group for the SIG. Members were involved in initial discussions about major issues, served as readers and evaluators, and participated in writing the grant.

In Massachusetts, the SEAP was credited with moving the SIG application process forward. The Massachusetts SEA was originally concerned about whether it would have the time and resources to develop the SIG. As a result of SEAP member interest and the panel's willingness to conduct the necessary needs assessment, Massachusetts was able to move forward and ultimately received a SIG award. One of the interviewees reported that several SEAP members contributed to the initial writing of the grant.

Summary

- Interviewees reported SEAP participation throughout the SIG process.
- Involvement of SEAPs in the SIG process ranged from participation on task forces/committees to key catalyst for the grant competition.
- SEAP members were informed of progress in SIG planning and implementation through personal participation, reports from SEAP representatives, and SEA reports.
- Interviewees expressed confidence that SEAPs will continue to be involved in implementation of the SIGs.

SEAP Involvement in the Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process

OSEP has intensified its work with states, parents, advocates, and other key stakeholders to improve results for infants, toddlers, children and youth with disabilities as a result of the 1997 amendments to IDEA. The Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process was designed to be a multifaceted process. It is organized around groups of requirements, identified as "cluster areas." The clusters associated with Part B and Part C requirements of the 1997 amendments provide the strongest links to improved educational results for students with disabilities, and the strongest links to improved results for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families (Academy for Educational Development, 2000).

The clusters, as stated in OSEP's Monitoring Manual dated May 3, 2000, are as follows:

Part B

- Effective general supervision of the implementation of Part B of IDEA 97.
- Provision of the free appropriate public education (FAPE) to children and youth with disabilities is facilitated through parent involvement in special education services.
- All children with disabilities receive a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) that promotes a high quality education and prepares them for employment and independent living after they exit school.
- All youth with disabilities, beginning at 14 and younger, when appropriate, receive individualized, coordinated transition services, designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post-school activities.

Part C

- Effective general supervision of the implementation of Part C of IDEA 97.
- All infants and toddlers with developmental delays, disabilities, and/or who are at-risk are identified, evaluated and referred for services.
- Outcomes for infants and toddlers and their families are enhanced by family-centered supports and systems of services.
- Eligible infants and toddlers and their families receive early intervention services (EIS) in natural environments (NE) appropriate for the child.
- Transition planning results in needed supports and services, available and provided, as appropriate, to a child and the child's family when the child exits Part C.

The OSEP Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process is built around the identified themes of continuity, partnership with stakeholders, state accountability, self-assessment, data-driven process, public process, and technical assistance. The process consists of seven phases: self-assessment, validation planning, validation data collection, reporting to the public, improvement planning, implementation of improvement strategies, and verification and consequences. As a state moves through the process, it appoints and works with a steering committee, composed of key stakeholders representing diverse perspectives. For Part B, the steering committee can be the SEAP, and for Part C, the state Interagency Coordinating Council.

A state is not required to use the SEAP as its steering committee. However, the committee should include key constituencies such as parents, advocates, individuals with disabilities, general and special education teachers, public and private service providers, administrators, consumer representatives, and childcare providers. In addition, the following groups should be represented: public charter schools, institutions of higher education, correctional facilities, vocational programs, protection and advocacy groups, Parent Training and Information Centers, and other groups or organizations as appropriate. For the most part, these key constituencies are reflected in the broad membership of the SEAPs. All states in the study have chosen to involve SEAP members in their steering committee.

SEAP members participating in this study reported that their panel has been included in the Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process to a much greater degree than in the past. Interviewees described involvement in past monitoring procedures as "cursory" and "minimal," and limited to participation of a few members in the monitoring hearings and exit conferences. The SEAP role was that of "receiver of information" from the SEA, and based on the previous conceptualization of the role of the advisory panel as that of merely receiving information and commenting on documents resulting from monitoring visits.

Connecticut is in the beginning stages of its Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process. In that state, some SEAP members have been asked to serve on the steering committee. These members will be involved throughout the process, with ongoing information reported to the full SEAP. Members from Idaho's SEAP are actively involved in their state's monitoring process, with members serving on a core team, the executive committee, and cluster teams. The final monitoring report will go to the Idaho SEAP for review.

Interviewees from Massachusetts, Montana, and Nebraska reported that their SEAPs have been involved from the beginning of the monitoring process, with members serving as the core of the steering committee and participating in focus groups. The SEAP role is perceived to be significant and interviewees stated that they believe the SEAP's involvement will continue throughout the monitoring process. Ohio and Pennsylvania also reported SEAP involvement on their steering committee and workgroups, with information regularly reported to the SEAP membership. Maryland's SEAP has been involved in the Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process from the beginning and one interviewee stated that this process has been viewed as extremely positive for the state.

Involvement of SEAPs in the implementation of the Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process was described as "intense" and "in the forefront" by interviewees. Following are some

comments made by interviewees as they talked about the impact of the Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process on SEAP organization and membership:

- Increased awareness of the many factors involved in improving education for individuals with disabilities.
- Increased communication between the SEA and SEAP.
- Increased involvement of SEAP membership on state committees and workgroups.
- A willingness on the part of the SEA to bring the SEAP "to the table from day one."
- SEAP "ownership" of the mission and activities of the state.
- SEAP membership is encouraged by an increase in the interaction between Part B and Part C with the goal of improving services.
- A strengthened belief that the state values the SEAP and its role in the Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process.
- A perception that "the timing was good" because the State Improvement Grant and Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process complemented each other.
- A perception that the SEAP will continue to be included in the Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process.
- SEAP membership has proactive involvement in preparing information to address the Cluster Areas outlined in the OSEP Monitoring Process.

Even when interviewees reported that they perceived their SEAPs have always been active in monitoring, they stated that there had been an increase in SEAP involvement in the Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process. SEAP interviewees expressed the perception that they serve an important role in addressing issues that relate to the education of individuals with disabilities in their states. One person's comment summarizes the attitude that was communicated by a number of interviewees regarding the Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process: Continuous Monitoring Process is "the best thing that has come down in the 28½ years that I have been in education."

Summary

- Interviewees reported that SEAPs are experiencing extensive involvement in the activities and issues associated with the Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process.
- Most SEAP interviewees perceive their involvement in the Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process to be that of serving on the steering committee, collecting data, and responding to information obtained in the process.

- SEAP involvement in the Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process is reported to have increased SEAP members' awareness of the many issues associated with the education of individuals with disabilities.

- SEAP members' involvement in the Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process has served to increase communication between SEAP and the SEA.

Concluding Remarks and Direction for Future Study

Interviewees for this study perceive that the role of the SEAPs has expanded. For some panels, the changes have been realized in the increased breadth of new topics now being brought to the table. The greatest example of role expansion, as reported by interviewees, has been SEAP involvement with the SIG and the Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process. These two areas, and the multitude of related issues such as assessment that are intertwined in these two processes, reportedly consume the majority of the panels' efforts. Panel members perceive that they have a valued role in the state. One interviewee summed up comments made by others when stating, "...the State Special Education Department is willing to [bring] you to the table from day one." Another interviewee described the SEAP role as a much "richer" experience than in the past.

When interviewees were asked to share any challenges that the SEAP had experienced since passage of the 1997 amendments to IDEA, the responses were limited. The most frequently reported challenge was that of ensuring representation in the required membership positions with specific reference to the "special rule of majority." Tied to this issue is the concern about maintaining adequate membership attendance at meetings and overcoming geographic barriers to attendance. States continue to provide many supports to encourage attendance. All interviewees expressed the importance of parents and individuals with disabilities being represented and actively involved on the SEAP.

During the course of the interviews, an issue surfaced that was not specifically addressed in the interview protocol. Seven of the eight participating states referred to the significance of strong leadership in regard to SEAP involvement and valued participation of the SEAP within the state. There was recognition of strong leadership at both the panel and state levels. In all three topic areas covered by this study, interviewees identified individuals in leadership positions who had been influential or had supported the involvement of SEAP membership in those activities. Leaders, because of their position and association with the SEAP, served to boost the recognition of the panel's efforts. In some situations, interviewees would contrast leadership styles and their impact on the SEAP. The quality of leadership skills was recognized as a powerful variable by many of the interviewees. Given the frequency of comments about the significance of strong leadership, it might be valuable to address this topic in future studies on state SEAPs, including exploration of opportunities for leadership training for panel members.

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Appendix A

Special Education Advisory Panels
Interview Protocol

Purpose of the Interview

1. To gain information regarding changes that have occurred in the membership composition, organizational policies and procedures, and responsibilities of state Special Education Advisory Panels (SEAPs) since the passage of the 1997 amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA);
2. To obtain information regarding the involvement of SEAPs in the State Improvement Grant (SIG) process;
3. To obtain information related to the involvement of SEAPs in the OSEP Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process, and
4. To develop a document that will reflect some of the changes that have occurred in the organization and responsibilities of SEAPs since the passage of the 1997 amendments to the IDEA.

- Inform interviewees that state-specific information will be included in the published document and they will have the opportunity to review all material written about their state prior to publication.

Background Information

State: _____ Date: _____ Time: _____

Name of Interviewee: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____

Email: _____

Interviewee's current role on SEAP: _____

Interviewee's past role/involvement: _____

- Request information about state demographics (e.g., number of school children, number of children served under IDEA, number of local education agencies).

- Request copies of documents related to the state SEAP (e.g., by-laws, policies and procedures, and annual reports).

Interview Part I - Obtain information regarding changes that have occurred in the membership composition, organizational policies and procedures, and responsibilities of state Special Education

Advisory Panels (SEAP) since the passing of the 1997 Amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

(***Note**: If documentation is supplied to provide information related to specific questions, relevant questions will be skipped during the interview process. Once basic information (e.g., number of panel members) is supplied, it will not be requested from other interviewees in the same state. Follow-up will be conducted if additional information is needed.*)

Membership Composition:

1. Size of the panel: Prior to IDEA '97_____ After IDEA '97_____

2. Describe any changes in the SEAP membership composition since IDEA' 97.

3. Is there a policy related to the representation of specific groups on the SEAP?
   If yes, describe policy.

4. Are there members on the panel who have an identified disability? Please specify.

5. Are there members of specific advocacy groups on the panel? Please specify.

6. Are there persons from traditionally underrepresented racial and ethnic groups on the panel? Please specify.

Panel Roles and Responsibilities:

1. Explain any changes in the frequency or scope of SEAP meetings since IDEA '97.

   - Special meetings or strategic planning efforts?
   - Sub-committees or task groups for special topics?

2. Describe any changes in the involvement of SEAP in State Education Agency (SEA) activities or committees since IDEA'97.

3. How would you describe collaborative efforts between the SEAP and other state advisory groups such as the Interagency Coordinating Council since IDEA'97? Is this a change since IDEA '97? Please describe.

4. Do state organizations such as parent groups, advocacy groups, or legislative groups, request representation from the SEAP? If yes, describe SEAP involvement. Is this a change since IDEA '97? Please describe.

5. Describe any training or in-service opportunities provided to members of the SEAP (e.g., SEAP member/s attended the Annual OSEP Leadership Conference). Did this occur before and/or after IDEA '97?

6. How would you describe the relationship between the SEAP and the State Education Agency? Has this relationship changed since IDEA '97?

7. Discuss any additional areas of change in the role or responsibilities of the SEAP since the passage of IDEA'97.

Interview Part II - Obtain information regarding the involvement of SEAPs in the State Improvement Grant (SIG) application process.

1. To what degree did SEAP members participate on stakeholder groups or planning committees for the SIG application process?

2. How was information regarding SIG process and proposed activities supplied to SEAP members?

3. What involvement did the SEAP members have in the development of the grant projects or objectives?

4. In the past, how has the SEAP been involved in state projects or grant applications?

5. Are there plans for the SEAP to be involved in implementation of the SIG? If yes, please describe. If implementation has begun, how has the SEAP involved?

Interview Part III - Obtain information related to the involvement of SEAPs in the OSEP Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process.

1. How would you describe the participation of SEAP members on steering committees and task groups related to Continuous Improvement Monitoring?

2. As the state has progressed through the Continuous Monitoring Process, what information has been disseminated to the SEAP membership?

3. Are there plans for the SEAP to be involved in the monitoring process as it continues through the various stages? If yes, please describe.

4. In the past, how has the SEAP been involved in the state monitoring process?

Wrap-up Questions

1. What challenges has the SEAP experienced since IDEA '97?

2. Is there information regarding SEAP initiatives or special projects that your state SEAP would be will to share with other states?